



## Corrie Ann Formston

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*Corrie Formston (née Heyne) was born in a British Army camp in Persia in 1920. After the first world war ended she came with her parents to Australia as a small child to a farm at Matcham, where she grew up helping her father on the farm. She married, had five children, then her husband developed cancer and she had to go to work to support the family. She was the breadwinner for over thirty years, working as a cleaner at up to three jobs simultaneously. After her children had grown up she married again. During her first marriage she began breeding and boarding cocker spaniels, which over the years has grown into a business which still occupies most of her time at her place at Somersby. Other interests are writing for Dog Show periodicals, making videos of dog shows, still photography, and gardening.*

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I was born in Persia (as it was called then - it's Iran now) in an army camp hospital. My Dad was in the British army in India in the first world war. When the Armistice was signed he was in the Middle East, and wives were allowed to come out and join their husbands while they were part of the occupying forces. My mother was one of those. She joined her husband in Persia, and I was born there. My birth was registered at Somerset House in England, so I was a Pom until I took Australian citizenship in 1992 in order to get a passport. The Kurds, who were a collection of mountain tribesman who cared nothing for the Armistice, used to come down out of the hills to raid the army camps and knock off supplies, or perhaps blow up a few vehicles - sort of like guerilla warfare. Four days after I was born, my mother and seven other women had to flee from Kirind, which was near Baghdad, right down to Basra, on the coast, to take a ship back to India. They went in a sort of caravan, on the backs of donkeys, each with their own baby - escorted by some soldiers. Only three of the babies survived that

journey.

My father's family had been in India for generations. They used to go back to England for education and things like that, as they did in those days. (Just as an aside, my great-great-grandfather was the Anglican Archdeacon of Madras. And I'm flat out now going to church at all!)(*Laughs*). My father could see the political writing on the wall as far as what was happening in India was concerned. Because he'd lived there for so long he could see the old Raj falling apart. (He wrote a lot of poetry, and when the second war was becoming imminent - but long before it was publicised - he wrote a poem that mentions Japanese eyes being on Australia. I think he wrote it about 1930, which was well before there was any sign of the war happening. "Wake Up Australia!" his poem was called)

My father was demobilised not long after the first war ended and we all came out to Australia, to land that they had bought in Matcham in 1906, just after they were married. My father used to get six months furlough after every three or four years' service in the Eastern Extension Cable Telegraph Co. prior to the first world war, so they had already been out a couple of times, and in 1920 they came out (with me) to stay permanently.

In 1906 to 1908 there was nothing at Matcham. Absolutely nothing. It was really rugged bush. When they first settled, my father, his brother, his mother and his younger sister all came out and roughed it in the bush, and my mother's brother Hugo also came. My mother was Dutch - she came from Java, but of Dutch parentage. She'd been a writer with the Bank of China in Singapore. She used to hand-write all their overseas and important documents, which were then done in beautiful calligraphic script.

I grew up as a farm boy, because my father didn't have a son. There were two girls - my sister was six years younger than me. When she was a baby of course Mum had her inside, while I was always outside with Dad, and as a result my sister grew more girlish and I got more boyish. My working life began on the farm, with my Dad teaching me to ride, milk, plough, build sheds, do fencing, to drive the Ford T when I was ten years old and to use the Treweller grubber to pull stumps. We had thousands (well, hundreds) of fowls and we bred chicks, packed eggs, and did all the jobs a farm entailed at that time. There were many other girls who did quite a lot of farm work in those days, but they weren't in quite the same position as myself because Dad treated me like a son - the son he didn't have. From the time I could walk I was hunting the cows and milking and feeding the animals and all that. (I've written about this period of my life in a book I started after my father died. It's a sort of backward look - it's set on the way to my father's funeral and my mind goes back in chapters, about what we did.)

Dad had a chaffcutter, and I used to stand on a box, pushing the stalks into the tray (I was about three and a half years old). One day I got down off the box and said, "Daddy, what's that part...?" pointing to where the big cogs come together. They were still turning, and somehow I managed to put my finger right in. (*Holds up her left index finger which is crumpled and misshapen at the tip.*) That was at night - we always did the chaffing at night before tea - we never had tea till about half past eight or nine o'clock - so Dad had to harness up the horse and sulky and take me in to the doctor miles away. I don't think my parents were too happy about the way that my finger was fixed - it shouldn't have been stitched down one side because it made it grow over sideways. And I took "stick" for that at school, too, I can tell you. Kids used to call me all sorts of things (like "cripple". It was only a *finger!*). My grandchildren always ask me what happened, and so the

whole story has to be told again. It's what I'd call an industrial accident of those times. And of course there were some dreadful accidents on farms. One time one of our neighbours was working with a circular saw when it hit a knot in the wood and the saw blade shattered and virtually cut him in half. There were a lot of accidents in the bush with axes and things like that, and often you'd be miles away from help. When my Uncle Hugo was alone on the farm his axe slipped and cut him behind the shoulder where he couldn't see it or get to it. Axes were razor sharp. He walked two or three miles to a house at Erina where old Mrs Wilson dressed it for him for several days.

I never had a pair of shoes till I was about eight or nine. And then when I had to go to school, that was something else! I used to work with my Dad on the cart, when he had a cart and used to do a run to the seaside, selling vegetables. Growing up with my Dad, and doing all those things that other girls didn't really do a lot of, was how I came to be an independent person. I didn't go to school, because there wasn't one close enough. There was a school at Erina Heights, but that was about four miles away, and if you lived further away than three miles you didn't have to go. So I got those Blackfriars lessons - by correspondence. Then later on I went to the first Holgate school - about 1928 or 1929. I was tested and placed in Class 3 at 10 years of age with kids of eight or nine. It was enough to give any kid an inferiority complex, but not me! I had plenty of confidence.

The teacher I had at Holgate hated me because I played up, and of course I didn't like him either. I thought he was pretty unfair, and he seemed to be making things harder for me. We moved to Terrigal when I was twelve and I went to Terrigal school. The teacher there was a lady teacher, and she put me up a class and a half from where I'd been at Holgate. The next year was my last year - the year that we sat for the Q.C.(the Qualifying Certificate). And who do you think came along to be the new master at Terrigal that year? My old teacher from Holgate! Consternation!

He told my father that he wouldn't allow me to sit for the Q.C. because I had not completed six years of primary schooling, which was a necessity at that time, apparently. As well, he said that my work was not up to standard, and that I wouldn't pass. I think it was that he wanted 100% passes, as all teachers want, and he was worried that I might spoil his percentage of passes. So Dad took me out of school at Terrigal and sent me to Gosford up on the hill where the Tech is now. George Walpole was the headmaster, and he was the loveliest man, a wonderful teacher and a great man in the district - (his family are still here). George Walpole took me under his wing, (and gave me a little extra time, I think), and I passed the Q.C. with a double language pass. And the teacher at Terrigal had three failures!

The plan was for me to go to Hawkesbury Agricultural College, but that didn't come to pass. (If I had gone I would have been one of the first girls to do so.) But I hated school like you wouldn't believe. I was considered to be a difficult child - which I suppose I was, in many ways. I wasn't a *bad* student, but I certainly could have done much better - but I didn't *want* to. What I was learning seemed irrelevant to me at the time. I was learning Latin, for which I didn't really have any purpose. I learnt some French, which has been useful later on, in passing - when you read things with French phrases in them - but it was irrelevant as far as making any money, or getting a job or anything. Teenagers don't see very far into the future or I may have taken a different direction. But I'm not sorry now.

By the time I was sixteen I was learning to cook for large numbers at Mrs

Wilson's Boarding House at Terrigal, after school and in holiday time. Dad worked on the Spooner Scheme, which was really working for the Dole. The men got two weeks on and two weeks off. If he had a very large family he'd get three weeks on and one week off. (The government could use that scheme to advantage now!) I also worked at *Kurrawyba Guest House* - later called *The California*, where the elite came for holidays.

When I left school I went to Sydney and by the time I was twenty I had settled there. After I was married, first there was the war, with my husband in the army, then the children started to come along. During the War years I had two kids and we lived in a tenement in Sydney, which bored me stiff, so I worked in various cafes while my kids went to kindergarten. At one cafe in Phillip Street I was head waitress and we got all the famous names from the 2GB radio shows of that time. People like Jack Davey, Bob and Dolly Dyer, as well as the judges and barristers from the law courts just across the road. 2GB was right opposite. It was wartime, and the American servicemen that came in would leave tips under the plate - as much as a whole week's wage for us at times. At one job in a restaurant I was given the potato peeling machine to work. (In the job interview, when they asked me if I could use them, I'd answered yes - in order to get the job). I proceeded to let it run too long... and the potatoes came out about as big as marbles! That was the only job I was sacked from in my life. After several other learning experiences, I went very well qualified, but without formal trade certificates, to work as a second cook at the old Wentworth Hotel behind Wynyard Station, near the Lottery Office. It was a busy hotel, and I was head grill cook there for twelve months until I became pregnant with my third child, and we went back to Gosford. My husband was out of army service by then.

Everybody was so poor before the war. There was a bit of a boom after the war, but by that time I had four kids. By 1943 we were living back in Gosford. There wasn't much work and we were on the Sustainance, getting coupons to buy food - as many others were also. I was doing the housewifely thing with five small kids.

Then my husband got ill with cancer. He had to be operated on many times. That was a sad business. He had to go for treatment to St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney twice a week, but we had nothing to go with. We couldn't pay the fare. But he *had* to go, so we borrowed money so that he could. There was very little in the way of assistance, except for my Mum and Dad. The Department of Social Service wouldn't give him any pension at first. I can't remember exactly why it took so long now, but we went for seventeen months before he got any assistance. So I had to go out to work. I went picking beans again. I picked beans for Joe Winter on the hills at Springfield behind East Gosford (it's now all covered with houses). It's hard work, and it's only seasonal. You're out in all weathers - it could be blazing hot in the Spring, or you could get wet - you had to keep on going in all weathers because the beans had to come off. But it was a crust.

My husband wasn't the type of person that could take up a hobby or something... start writing a book or something like that, and his health prevented him from doing manual work, and work for men then was mainly manual work. You were either that or a bank manager or a teacher, or a clergyman - or a farmer, and a farmer had to work hard. What else was there? You didn't even have an electric lawnmower in those days - you used a push-me-pull-you - so you had to be pretty fit. My youngest daughter was about two at this stage. My husband was at home, because he couldn't do anything much, but he was all right - he could mind the kids, and cook the dinner while I was away at work. But he was pretty miserable

because, being a man, that was hard to accept in that era. It's more acceptable now, as women are being accepted into the workforce and becoming more equal.

At that time, a couple of my children were at the local primary school. One day I was walking along Mann Street beside the school and I looked down into the school yard below and saw my eldest son, who was about ten or so, stoking the incinerator with a couple of other boys. They were skylarking and throwing things at each other. This is in school time. I watched them for quite a long time, then, very decisively, I went and knocked on the door of the headmaster's office. I said to him: "Why is my boy down there doing that and not up here doing school work like everybody else is doing?" "Oh," he said, "he's in the AO class, you know." (The AO class was for the ones that were not doing really well in school. 'Any Old class' was what we used to call it. In those days if you were in the AO class you were seen as unlikely to become an academic or require higher education, so they used to get those kids to pick up all the papers and burn them.) I said to the headmaster: "Look. I want my boy in class. If he doesn't learn a lot, then never mind, but he's got to learn *something*. He's going to have to leave - he's not going to go through high school because we haven't got that kind of money." He asked me what my situation was and I explained it to him. He said, "Well, Mrs McFarland," (as I was then), "do you want some work? Because the lady who has the tuck shop down here comes in to do the cleaning after school, but things haven't been very satisfactory. I'm pressing for a full-time cleaner to come in here and do this work. It might help your situation." So I said "Yes," straight away.

It was about 1950 when I took the job cleaning the school, and I was there for thirty years almost - bar a couple of months. At one time there I had five children at the high school at the one time. Four of them were girls. At first I was working for their food and clothing, then I worked for their schooling, then I worked for their weddings, and then I worked to help them a bit after they got married. And of course I kept working to be able to continue showing and breeding cocker spaniels. It had just become a habit to work!

At that time the school consisted of the old School of Arts building on Mann Street and four portables. The portables were supposed to be temporary, but they're still there now, 45 years later. The work was hard - no mechanical aids and just cold water and soap and brooms and mops. But it was a good job. It was a good job because it was male wages. It was thirty three hours on a broken shift. Besides, it was a steady job - just what I needed, since I was now the breadwinner, and with growing children needed so much more.

I had the responsibility of opening the school at six a.m. The only lights in the building were in the front office in the School of Arts building which had been converted to the Headmaster's office and three classrooms. The office floor was washed and polished by hand with bees wax from a round tin of yellow wax. Later on I invested in a small, two-brush electric polisher of my own which I smuggled in and used unbeknown to the boss. There was only one power point in the building. When I started at the school there was no tea room or staff room, and no lights in the class rooms, except in the School of Arts building. Some years after I started there the Department of Education built the new brick buildings on reclaimed ground between Mann Street and Dane Drive. Dane Drive wasn't there at this time - it was all swamp around where the school and the playing fields are now, and where the Kindergarten now stands. But the numbers of children escalated so rapidly that the temporary portables had to be retained and even more demountables added.

Very shortly after I started at the school cleaning job I started to get greedy and ambitious, and I began to wonder what I was going to do with the rest of my time. My husband was busy, having taken over the house, so that was good. We had a garden. Somewhere along the way I started breeding and showing dogs, and there was never enough money for the extras that I wanted to have. So then I got another job - at the Regal Theatre. It was a picture house that used to be where the Commonwealth Bank is now on the corner of Donnison Street and Mann Street. (Before that, the only picture house was in the Valencia Arcade, which, when I was a small girl, used to be the markets where we took our produce to sell. "Buscombes".)

So I had the cleaning of the school and the cleaning of the Regal Theatre, which I did in between nine and three. I used to go to the school from six to nine, or thereabouts. When I applied for the job at the Regal Theatre I tremblingly went along and said to the boss there that I'd love to have the job, but I couldn't be there at nine o'clock because I couldn't leave the school till half past nine. It turned out later on that the headmaster didn't mind at all if I left ten minutes earlier, and the man who ran the theatre didn't mind if I started half an hour later. I had the two of those jobs for seventeen years then.

With the theatre job I could leave when I'd finished, and on Saturdays I always had the locking up to do. I also got to keep any money and bottles dropped on the floor - sometimes as much again as my pay for the three hours. Purses and jewellery were turned in to the office. Anything not claimed was given to me after a few months. The empty bottles came to a considerable amount, too. As well, we were given free passes for the whole family for the Saturday matinee, and that became our special outing with the children - sort of our quality time together.

About that time my eldest daughter and I played First Grade Vigoro for the district and competed in Newcastle and other venues. I won trophies for the Best Bowling Average and Best Batting Average. (As a young girl, when we lived at Terrigal I did a lot of swimming and swam for Gosford High and the district down in Sydney, in the Domain Baths. It was a hell of a battle to afford the Speedo swimming costume, and in the end someone put in for me. It didn't make me feel bad. I just took it, and swam harder, to try and make it worthwhile for the philanthropist who had donated my swimsuit.)

In the 1950s there was a Dutch woman living in the street above us whose husband had died of something terrible. She had three little kids. Now I had my bank account with the Rural Bank. (This is all connected). And in the school holidays we used to scrub all the walls and do those bigger cleaning jobs at the school that you couldn't do properly through the teaching term. One holidays I'm there working away when along comes the manager of the Rural Bank - on his way to see the headmaster. He came round the corner and asked me the way to the headmaster's office. After I'd told him, he said to me, "Do you work here all the time?" I said that I did. "I wish you worked for me," he said. "I'm looking for a cleaner. Do you know somebody?" I explained that I already had two jobs and that I didn't know where I'd get the time from to do it, but that I *did* know a lady who had come on hard times who might be interested. I told her about it, but she said, "Oh no. I'm getting the widows' pension. I'm not going to work." I had assumed that she'd jump at it. So the next day when I knocked off I went round to the bank manager's office and said to him, "Look. She doesn't want it." "What am I going to do then?" he said, "Won't you come in and do it?" "But when would I come in?" "You can come in whenever you like! You can come Saturday,

Sunday, you can come at night. You can come any time, as long as it's cleaned up in the morning." Oh, greedy me! So I told him that I'd help him out for a few weeks and we'd see how it went. So he put me down as a permanent casual, which meant more money. So that was great. I had two permanent casual jobs and one permanent. We got on pretty well. (*Laughs.*) I did the bank for twelve years - until they changed the contractors.

With the three jobs to do, I used to get up in the morning around quarter to five, and do a few things around the place - (by then I had the dogs as well). Then I went to the school at six and opened it up - it was only ten minutes away. I worked there till half past nine, when I went down to the theatre till three, after which I came back to the school. Then I used to go home, have tea, and do anything else I had to do for the dogs and kids or whatever. Then I'd go down to the bank and work for two hours, and come home about half past ten, always walking - I had no car then. I did that two hours each night, but if something happened that I didn't do the full two hours I'd get up at four in the morning and go in and do an hour in the morning before I went back to the school. And on Saturdays I'd go in and polish the floors at the bank in the morning and clean the theatre after the matinee in the afternoon.

I hardly saw my children from one day to the next. That bothered me somewhat, but it didn't seem to bother anybody else - as long as they got what they wanted, and needed, it didn't seem to matter. Also, I had my parents living there, and my father was a big thing in my life. Although he was getting very old, he was *there*, you know - as a stable influence on them. By this time the children were pretty well grown up anyway. They all went through high school and left and got various jobs and eventually got married, with as fine a wedding as anyone else in those days. Joe Winter (whose farm I'd picked beans on) was a caterer in a big way in Gosford at the time. He catered for my eldest daughter's wedding and acted as MC at the reception. Joe was a good guy!

People have asked me why I stayed with those jobs, why I didn't leave and do something else. Well, I didn't *know* anything else. I might have done Latin and French, but it wasn't any use to me, and I certainly hadn't done enough to go to university. Anyway, the university was in Sydney - there was no university at Ourimbah then - and there was no fast electric train to Sydney - it used to take two and a half hours to get to Sydney. And you couldn't do a subject at a time like you can now, it was go or not go. And anyway, of course, we didn't have the money. Even the idea of Hawkesbury College depended on the assumption that I would get a bursary to go there. Besides all that, no other work payed as much as the cleaning.

In the time I worked at the school the cleaning staff grew to five. Towards the end of my time there the staff changed a lot. First one and then another would resign or just leave because the work didn't suit them, or was too hard. There was always some new person to "break in" to the job. They would stay a few months and then go.

When I retired in 1980 I got a great send-off. There were twenty seven teachers in the school by then. One day all classes were suspended while a morning tea was held where visiting officials from the Education Department and the Union made speeches about my service record and so on, and presentations were made to me. I was so overcome it was all I could do to manage a "Thank You" and nothing more. Me! Who'd never been at a loss for words before - or since!

And so I left the school and began a new life of retirement here at Somersby. I often wonder how I ever had time to go to work. There was so much in my life to do, and there still is.

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Everybody was interested in working in those early days, because working was money. It was the *only* way you got it. I mean, you didn't get it handed to you on a plate the way they do now, which I find totally immoral. There's got to be some other way. I don't know what it is - (it's not my job to work it out). The people who are supporting the country by paying taxes which go to the people who do nothing - those people are beginning to get annoyed about it. In other countries it has turned into a revolt. One day, if there are enough of them here, they're going to jack up and say they're not going to be the bunny any longer. They're already saying they won't join the private hospital funds because they're just as entitled as anyone to free medicine. So, there's got to be more money found now for the people that were providing the money before for those who collect their dole and do nothing.

Aside from all that, I got into some strife with the Taxation Department - well, it wasn't the Taxation Department at first, it was the Union. I had to join the Union to work at the school, and I wasn't supposed to have any other job. I worked for that government job and I wasn't allowed to have any other job. It was a government rule as far as I could understand. This all took place in the early fifties. But I had the two part-time casual jobs as well as the job with the school, and they said I couldn't do that. I used to write them letters about it, and I pointed out pretty strongly that *someone* had to keep the children because my husband was in no position to, and they'd go away for a while, but then they came back. My chief beef was with the Taxation Department because I couldn't claim my husband as a dependant, whereas a man could claim for a wife. That has come in since, and I'd say I was partly responsible for the change. If enough people do something, sometimes something happens. I'm always writing to Council about one thing or another - trying to get various things changed.

People don't do enough. They just accept. But I don't take the first "No" for an answer. Here's an example: One of my daughters got married, and she had a little boy. She was very young when she got married. They came to live with us because the house we lived in was a big one. It was a big, old wooden house - but that's another big story. It was at the end of Donnison Street in Gosford, opposite the clothing factory on the corner of North Albany and Donnison Streets. It was in the bush at that time - everywhere was bush. Up the back was the quarry with the road to the quarry that the trucks brought the quarry stone down. We had an acre and a half there.

While my daughter was staying with us we had rain - torrential rain for months on end. I decided that with the baby we had to have a washing machine. I went along to Waltons, who were in Gosford at the time, to buy a washing machine on time payment. By this time my husband had died, and I was a widow. I found that I had to have my husband's signature on the hire purchase agreement. I explained that I didn't have a husband, and they said they couldn't go ahead with the hire purchase because you had to be guaranteed by the breadwinner in the family. "I am it!" I told them, and I pushed it and pushed it, till in the end they agreed. Anybody else would have walked out. Now, of course, that has been altered also, and women in their own right can go and do these things. You can go and buy a car, as long as you can show that you can pay for it. I had my own

bank account - that was all right, but loans you couldn't get. That was similar to the hire purchase.

Although things are not as tight for women these days as they were then as far as borrowing money and things like that goes, a few years ago I went to borrow some money when I wanted to help one of my daughters who was buying some property. But I forgot that I had turned seventy, and they wouldn't lend it to me because I was a pensioner! The Commonwealth Bank, with whom our family had dealt for nearly seventy years, wouldn't lend me seven thousand dollars! And only because I was on the old age pension! And that was only five or six years ago. But even that has now changed - in that short time - because pensioners can now borrow.

I used to get sick leave and paid holidays when I worked for the government, but we people who were brought up in the thirties just didn't take a day off. You might be sick, but you went anyway - you just didn't think about it. I can't remember the details of how it all came in, but later on the scheme was that you got two weeks' sick leave, but if you didn't take it, it went away. So everyone managed to have two weeks' paid sick leave somewhere along the way. But when you had time off they didn't put anyone in your place, so when you came back you had double the amount of work to do, which would *really* make you sick!.

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I think it's important to stress that if you're prepared to jump up and down enough there are times when you *can* do something. And yes, I think I refuse to be sat on by bureaucracies because of the way my father encouraged me when I was growing up. If you want to do a thing enough, you can do it. The daughter that had the little baby that I bought the washing machine for - it ended up that they went to England when the baby was about eighteen months old. They decided to go and make their life in England. Things rolled on, and they had three more children. Then, (skipping quite a few years), the marriage began to get shaky, and my daughter wanted to better herself and she wanted to study again. She'd left high school here in third year, so she went to night school in England and got a scholarship to Cambridge, and with three children, she went to Cambridge University. The marriage broke up, and to cut the story short, she ended up as a surgeon and a lawyer, and she's now in charge of Accident and Emergency at Wyong Hospital - been there about six years. She's got a couple of other places she works at as well - one at Lakehaven and one at Toukley. She's a bit like me. She's got her finger in everything. I can't see her these days without making an appointment! So, if you want to do a thing enough - you can do it. That girl was no brainbox or anything - she was a good student but she was too naughty and wild to do well at school. She was a wild kid, and I always think a wild kid, if they can only be channelled in the right direction, is better than anything else, because they've got spirit. You are born with this tendency, I think. It can be brought out and helped along, but you do have to be born with it. I've got four girls, and they're all different, but she is very like me, even to look at, and the things she has done!....we were bad, we were bad girls. We were just wicked, bad, tomboy girls. "That girl there, she's terrible, she'll come to nothing." At least, that's how we looked to the rest of the world who thought you were outrageous if you wore pants instead of dresses, and played football and rode horses bareback. Now we have women's soccer teams. Not then - or we would have been in it!

I used to ride my horse all over Matcham and everywhere, doing all these wild things that girls weren't supposed to do. But I didn't care a damn that people

disapproved. It may have even helped it along - may have made me more determined to go against the establishment. I still do it. I'm an A Class international dog judge. I have a reputation for "doing my thing". Some judges, like anybody else, can be swayed into doing the odd shonky thing if it's to their benefit. To me that will not happen. I don't get a lot of judging appointments, but the ones I get are beauties. They're good ones. Breed specialties. I have respect in those circles.

There were a few other girls that I think were similar - there are the odd ones I could think of who were bold and did things. But, you know, if I was younger I'd be sitting for parliament, or going for Gosford Council - I'd be trying those things. But it's too late for me now - and I'm busy with other things as well. I haven't been involved with conventional party politics much through my life, though I've always taken an interest in the politics of clubs and associations, and things like that. I was secretary of several Dog Clubs in the sixties. We made a lot of money - some of which was donated towards the building of Woy Woy Olympic Pool, for one thing.

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People have asked me the reason I stayed in the school cleaning job for so long. There's two ways of looking at it: Some people would see it as having no ambition, just staying in the same old job for so long, but that wasn't so in my case. The job suited me really well, because I could do so many other things as well - in fact, in those days it was one of the few jobs that gave you that flexibility. And although I say it myself, I did well at everything I touched (with the exception of the Hobart potato peeler!)

Over the years, technology changed the cleaning jobs a lot. When I started at the school, the floors were all tongue and groove wooden floors, and you swept them. It was all dusty (and if this cough I've got doesn't stop I'll know why). You swept them first, then you had this wringer-bucket thing, then you mopped them with water and you wiped the desks. I had seven rooms to do like that, and it was hard work. You didn't do all seven every day - you made your own system. Nobody cared, as long as it was done. They didn't ask you how or why or anything else. The headmaster that gave me that job in the first place was a very nice fellow, and he was very happy with what I did because the previous woman used to just put the hose through the window and hose the rooms out. And you know that light brown colour they used to paint school rooms then? Well when I started there the walls used to be black up to the window sills, because when you hose it splatters up and then it sticks. (The trick is to wet the wall first. But you're not supposed to do that sort of thing.) When we went into the new school which was built later, they had lino squares on the floor and I had a polisher to shine them with. But because I could now do the rooms quicker, they gave me more rooms to do! It was easier to sweep and use the polisher than sweep the bare boards and mop them - though you had to put the polish on with a mop, of course. But it wasn't quite as hard - though there were a terrible lot of windows to clean and fires to light and clean up in winter.

In those days prior to 1960 cleaning was thought of as just a charlady's job, but these days it's highly technical. You have to know what and how to use the various industrial cleaning products now. Things have certainly changed in this regard, and become even more remunerative - so much so that Neville Wran made it his business!  
I got a sense of satisfaction out of what I did because I was the best one there!

Although they didn't have a foreman, I was treated as one because I had been there for so long. By the time I left there they had five cleaners because it had grown so big, and I was the one that would be consulted if there was some problem - not that they gave me any extra money for the extra responsibility. I didn't have the responsibility of telling the others what to do, but the head master would sometimes discuss any problems to do with the cleaning with me before deciding on a course of action.

I was a good worker at whatever I did. This came from my Dad always saying to me: "Look. It doesn't matter what job you do, whether it's a high-up one or the lowliest thing or what, if you work hard and do a good job you will always get on and make money. Do your best." He used to say this from when I was quite little, and I've always done it.

When I got married for the second time I had no more children to my second husband, but he brought two children to the marriage with him - they were five and nine years old. I brought them up also. The youngest would be around 35 by now, and he's...well, he's my son, just like a natural child. He's a good one, and stuck to me. My eldest son was a drum major in the police pipe band, and in 1988 he had a bad car accident and fell on hard times as a result. He lives next door to me here now, and has a little business with his wife making Scottish memorabilia. He grew up in Gosford and taught himself to swing the mace and became Drum Major of Northern Suburbs Scottish Band, and later of the NSW Pipe Band, and has won many championships.

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The job cleaning the theatre was the first to go, because they closed down the theatre. Then I left the job at the bank - or more accurately, it left me. I was the last person employed by the Rural Bank as a cleaner in the whole of NSW. They kept me on for a full 18 months after everybody else had been replaced by contract cleaners. They gave me a beautiful reference and a lot of money when they paid me off. The bank that I cleaned were the only premises in Gosford to survive the big floods in 1963 without the lino on the floor lifting - because I used to seal them properly when I cleaned them. (Most people don't realise that Gosford is built over a sort of Tank Stream like Sydney is - it runs roughly diagonally underneath the town from north to south. Now it is piped and comes out near the eastern end of the new flyover at Graham Park).

By the time the bank cleaning job fell through I was married again. My second husband was a chef. That was a pretty good job but he used to have to travel from here to Sydney which was a bit of a drag. But we had the two incomes.

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My mother lived till she was 93. She was a very well-educated woman. She spoke seven languages. She worked in the bank in Singapore, as I said earlier, and she was high up in it when women didn't do those kind of jobs. I suppose you could say she was a bit before her time. She worked hard running the farm with Dad when they came to Australia. After the second war we all lived together in the house at Donnison Street, which was what they call a Dual Occupancy today - it was divided up into two separate residences. It had ten rooms in it altogether. It was a bit like an extended family. The presence of my parents next door was helpful - they helped a lot. My Dad had a clause in his Will that my mother had the right to stay in the house for her lifetime - not dreaming how long

her life was going to be. (Mum lived on with us for nineteen years after Dad died.) Dad was sixty when he went back into the second world war. He put his age back nine years. He was born in 1880, and altered that to 1889 to get into the army again. He was nearly bald, but he dyed what was left. Trouble was, when he came to get the age pension later on he had a lot of trouble - though eventually he did get it.

We should have sold that place years before. If we had, we would have done a lot better than we did. If we'd sold it only the year before we did we would have got at least a third more for it than we did. It was boom time and they just took it from under our noses. It was my fault because I didn't read in the paper what the Council was doing. You're supposed to read all that stuff because you never know what they're going to do next. We were in the middle of negotiating with Westfield Plaza to buy the property when the Council changed the zoning and Westfield dropped out. And where are they now? Tuggerah! (And elsewhere, of course.) So the Council resumed that land for extensions to the technical college eighteen years ago and never did a thing with it. It's still sitting there! Doing nothing. (The house has been demolished, of course.) And we ended up getting only about two thirds of what it was really worth because it was resumed! While we lived there the Council used to drum it into us to keep the property cleared of lantana - even on parts which we didn't use - yet since they've owned it it's been neglected.

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The business with the dogs happened gradually. When the children were in High School and the Primary School had grown, there were four female cleaners and one male cleaner working there by 1965 or so. In 1960 I became entitled to an extra bonus and I had a good wage and superannuation coming in. This meant I could indulge in my hobby of breeding dogs much more. After I left some of the cleaning jobs, the dogs took on more importance. It wasn't just breeding the dogs, which I did well, but because they did well in shows I became well-known. (My dogs have won Best Dog at the Sydney Royal and the Best of Breed Group many times, and it became a top stud kennel. I turned it into a company in 1978 and built proper kennels on a larger scale here at Somersby.)

At first it was just looking after a few dogs now and then for friends, and then I started charging a few people who came. We were still living at Gosford at the time, and we didn't have much room for kennels. We were being crowded out. The clothing factory was built opposite, then they opened more roads up and houses and multi-storey buildings started to appear everywhere, and you couldn't really have proper kennels there anyway. So the rapid growth of Gosford put an end to the dog business in Donnison Street. I couldn't have the dogs there any more. They were bringing cars up to park them near the house, and they'd leave at one in the morning from right outside my mother's bedroom when she was practically dying. You couldn't even live there any more. When we finally sold I had an arrangement where I could have up to two years to re-establish myself - I played on the dog business a bit - but we didn't need to use all of the two years and we'd built and were in here at Somersby within about nine months.

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I was about forty five when I remarried. All my kids were grown up and married by then. But then after twelve years my second husband died - in the same way as my first - he got lung cancer and had to go into hospital and have a lung removed

in 1978. He never recovered, and died six months after we moved into our new home here, which was really a nasty blow to all my plans and dreams for this place.

In 1977 Gosford Council had changed the zoning and bumped the rates up to four thousand a year on the place in Donnison Street. I refused to pay the increase, and made them take it out of the settlement when they resumed the place. With that four thousand we went to England. My husband's people all lived in Chester - he had two brothers and a sister still alive. And it was a good job he visited them when he did, because believe me, within four years after we came back they were *all* dead! Including him! It was very sad. But that's life. He was relatively young, too - but a heavy smoker. Both my husbands were. My first husband had cancer of the stomach as well as some other problems, but he actually died of lung cancer. He had radiotherapy for thirteen years, going back and forth to St Vincent's twice a week first, then once a week, then once every three months - this went on for years. They do it differently now, of course. He was relatively all right for a while but then he started to deteriorate and it got right through him. He was nursed at home for over four months. There was no palliative care in those days. That was a very stressful time.

My second husband's name was Ron. He used to like what he did as a chef, and he'd come home and cook, and that suited me down to the ground. Although I always did the things that a wife has to do when I had to - I always did them and I did them well - I never really *liked* doing the cooking. After my first husband died the kids all married off one at a time and went their separate ways, and the last one was married one September and it was at the end of that month that I met Ron. I can't remember exactly when I got married the second time - I think it was around 1966 because I remember talking about the change to the dollar from pounds, and that was 1966. (*Laughs.*) It was a very good time for me, actually. Ron was very good to me and I did a lot of things in that time that I'd been unable to do before, such as being able to afford a holiday to the UK.

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I lived alone here for some ten years after Ron died, (until my son came and built the house next door). I was on my own till then and did all the work myself. I had picked up a couple of caravans cheap and I used to have people living in them from time to time. (One of my grandchildren is living in one at the moment.) Gradually I built the place up myself - the fences and all that. As I got older and there was more of the heavier work to do I got a young chap from Toukley to come and help me for a few hours a day. After a while he met my grand daughter and married her. They have two kiddies and they lived here for a time in two of the caravans which had been put side by side and he built a proper annexe between them. When the second baby came they rented a little brick house up the road. They used to come to work with me here - they used to handle my dogs for me. But eventually the old lady who owned the brick house died and the estate was put up for auction, so they had to move, and they've gone to Murrurundi to live. I was able to help them out with the loan of a bit of money to help them get started. When they went I didn't bother renting the caravans again, till my grandson came with his family, and he works for me now. Another extended family! (I'll pass this way but once!)

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You ask me if I consider myself to be retired now, or still working. Well, you be

the judge. I get up at about quarter to six now, and in summer about five o'clock, and I let all of forty-odd dogs out one at a time for a run and supervise them coming back in again, rain or shine. Then I feed the litters of puppies when I have them, which is most of the time, and do the cleaning that goes with it. It keeps me pretty busy. Today has been very quiet - the phone has only rung once since you came. Very often it will ring twenty five times in one day. But I still need a bit of help with this place. It's quite enormous, really, and dogs make a lot of mess and it's got to be kept clean. You've got Council inspection, and you've got Police inspection, and stuff like that. Apart from anything else, if you don't keep things clean you don't get business. There are accounts to tend to and letters and pedigrees to write and my house to maintain, plus ordering and getting large amounts of meat and dry dog food which has to be packed away. Then the afternoon runs for the dogs, and their meal that I give them around 5 p.m. - that takes an hour or so.

When I moved here to Somersby it was ostensibly to retire. But now, eighteen years later, I'm still the working Managing Director of a considerably busy business. I engage in many other activities as well, such as judging dogs here and internationally, lecturing, and writing for dog periodicals. All this keeps me in touch with many people and there is never a dull moment nor enough hours in the day.

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Looking back over my life, I've thought a lot about my circumstances in those post war years when there was so little in terms of social welfare compared to today. I don't think I thought about it much at the time. I don't think we thought of it as unfair, because we had nothing to compare it to. At the time I thought I was just lucky to have the opportunity to get those jobs. But of course as soon as I got a job we lost the Sustenance. And within six months or so we also lost the pension that my husband had finally succeeded in getting, and he became my dependent. And that's when I had the arguments with the Tax people and the Union. I *did* think that was unfair, and I wrote lots of letters about it, too. Now your pension is arranged to include some income as well. Not then!

There are lots of ways that I think the social welfare system could be cleaned up, or made better. For instance, a pensioner who has a property like myself, and can grow their own vegetables and can keep a cow or something like that, and does not pay rent, should not be entitled to as much as someone who is paying an enormous rent in the city, like some do have to. It could be equalised. I'm given a rail pass, but I don't use it, because I drive my car. It's not transferable either. I just feel that this is sheer waste. But it's also unfair. It's unfair to the person who, because they do it a different way, doesn't get any help.

I think Social Welfare has gone too far - it's gone in too many wrong directions, somewhere. I believe in helping people who need help, but very often people who need help aren't getting it, or aren't getting enough - and other people can get it too easily. I've got thirty grandchildren and eight great grandchildren, and I know about some of the things that go on because one or two of them are a bit like that. They seem to believe that the world owes them, and the social security money is just there to be taken.

The really rich people today - the Packers and the like - they didn't make their money digging ditches. They had a start in life. And money makes money. I found that out. As soon as I had a little bit I could make more, because I could borrow

more to work with. When you have nothing you cannot borrow ten cents from anybody. But if you've got a bit of property or a car or something, you can mortgage the property or give somebody a lien on the car, and you can get money. Once you've got some, you can get some more.

I think about this sort of politics a lot, and I've come to the conclusion that I don't know - I just don't know which way it should be done. We lay the blame on Keating, but it's not all his fault. I think he's a very clever man. But we have the wrong form of getting people into parliament, and again it comes back to money. Although the pollies get a lot of money, they don't earn nearly as much as the top executives in industry, and therefore we don't always get the right person for the job. Those who run things should have better qualifications and be paid enough to keep them honest. There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians!

I've been a bit disappointed that none of my children seem to be very keen on the idea of doing something with this property here. There's five acres over there that you could put a caravan park on, for example. But I haven't got any interest in it at my stage of things - I'm doing what I'm doing and that's all I want to do now. I come to loggerheads with them a bit sometimes because they reckon I'm a bit too much of a slavedriver - and they might be right! I can't stand laziness!

I look back on my life without any regrets. Some people I talk to say: "Weren't your children disadvantaged?" (because I was not a mother at home). Well I believe I did what was best at the time. My children were never alone at home the way "latch key kids" are now. I worked hard to give them the necessities of life in keeping with the times. They all grew into solid citizens, each with their own home and way of life of their own choosing, with jobs to go to. I have my interests, and a bit of a nest egg to divide between them when I am gone. I feel I "played hard, done good"... *for a woman!*

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*(Recorded September 16 and 19, 1995.)*